



Donald M. Hooton - Oral Testimony

Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection and
the Subcommittee on Health

March 10, 2005

20 short months ago, our youngest son Taylor took his own life. He was just 2 weeks away from beginning his senior year in high school. This past spring, he would have been a starting pitcher on his varsity baseball team.

During the fall of his junior year, his JV coach told this 6'3" – 175 pound young man that he needed to "get bigger" to improve his chances of making varsity. Taylor took his coach's advice seriously, and he resorted to use of anabolic steroids as a short-cut to reach his objective.

I am convinced that Taylor's secret use of anabolic steroids played a significant role in causing the severe depression that resulted in his suicide. I have learned that what happened to Taylor – the events leading up to and including his suicide – are right out of the medical "textbook" on steroids.

And, Taylor is not the only young person that this has happened to. Since going public with Taylor's story, we have been contacted by a number of families from across America whose children have met the same fate as Taylor.

How widespread is steroid usage amongst our youth?

This question is difficult to answer because the users are so secretive about their usage. According to Dr. Chuck Yesalis of Penn State University, "In my 58 years, other than pedophilia, I've never witnessed a behavior as secretive as this."

With secrecy in mind and based on what I have heard directly from kids, I believe most studies underestimate actual usage rates.

Experts put the usage rate at about 4-5% of the total US High School population. Some studies have put the use of steroids at about 11-12% of the junior/senior HS male population in some parts of the country – for example, the South.

During the days following Taylor's funeral, many of Taylor's friends opened up to my wife and I about what's really going on amongst their peer groups. They told us that there are more kids doing steroids than the percentages that I just shared with you. Some estimated that at least a third of the high school players that show up to play football under the lights on Friday nights are "juicing."

Many factors contribute to the increase in steroid usage amongst our kids including the pressure to win and earn a scholarship, combined with heavy peer pressure. I believe a major catalyst is the poor example being set by our professional teams – athletes and management. Our kids look up these guys – they want to do those things that the pros do to be successful.

When I looked for a quote to illustrate the messages that the pros are sending to our kids, I didn't have to look far. In Jose Canseco's new book he says, "I truly believe that because I've experimented with it for so many years that it can make an average athlete a super athlete. It can make a super athlete incredible. Just legendary!" He attributes his success in baseball to his illicit use of steroids.

And, the kids know that Jose is not the only big league player that has used steroids to help them get to the top. Let me take this opportunity to speak to players like Barry Bonds and others who insult our intelligence by claiming not to know what it is that they've been taking to improve their performance – "Gentlemen, the next time you are wondering what that stuff is that is causing you to gain the

muscle and strength that allows you to hit so many home runs, just ask any high school baseball player in America. They know exactly what it is that you've been taking to get that kind of results and they are following your lead."

Our youngsters hear the message: it's loud, it's clear, and it's wrong – "if you want to achieve your goals, it's okay to use steroids to get you there because the pros are doing it."

Major League Baseball and other sports need to take serious steps to stop the use of steroids by the players. To use steroids in sports is cheating in addition to being a felony. Slapping a player on the wrist with a 10-game suspension sends just one more signal to the kids that management is not serious about ridding the game of this junk. Forcing a pro to miss just 6% of the season is equivalent to forcing a high school kid to sit the bench for one of his games! And, we shouldn't be talking about whether to put an asterisk next to these guys' records! We're missing the whole point. We should be throwing them out of the big leagues.

Over 80% of illegally sold steroids our kids are buying come across the border from Mexico. They are of very questionable quality – most are veterinary grade at best, designed for use in horses, pigs, and cattle. They are very easy to buy. They are sold by drug pushers at most local gyms – Taylor met his dealer at our local YMCA. And, yes they can even be easily purchased over the Internet.

Now, what can we do about it?

I believe testing is a crucial way of controlling the abuse of steroids among athletes – it is the only way to know for sure whether kids are using these drugs. In addition, a random testing program can act as a deterrent against kids using steroids. Today's HS student has no fear of getting caught – there is no testing, most coaches are not taking active steps to stop usage, parents don't know what to look for and neither do many family physicians, and law enforcement officials are not paying serious attention to the illegal use of steroids by our kids.

A testing program will create a risk of getting caught and will give the kids a good excuse to say “no” when they are pressured to use steroids.

Another weapon that we have in this fight is education.

Students need to understand that these drugs can seriously harm them. But warning a 16-year-old about the dangers of having a heart attack or developing liver problems when he turns 35 or 40 will probably fall on deaf ears.

That’s why I believe that our coaches are the most important first target for this education - they are the key to solving this problem. Coaches are positioned to reward kids that take steroids. For example, a young man may earn the starting position on the defensive line because of the increase in weight and strength that resulted from secret steroid use. The coach may not know that this player used steroids to achieve this result. But believe me, the other kids on the team know how the result was achieved and they get a clear message that they need to take steroids in order to compete.

With this in mind, I believe that we must take steps to make coaches more responsible & accountable for supervising this situation with their teams. Coaches need to be:

- a) Trained to recognize the symptoms of steroid abuse,
- b) Trained to know what to do about it, and
- c) Held accountable for insuring that their teams are steroid-free.

Coaches should be forced to implement a zero tolerance policy against steroid abuse.

In addition, our medical community needs to step up to this problem. Doctors have told me that this is a subject that they are not trained on in medical school. Clinics are not prepared to handle steroid abusers – I have heard about a number of steroid users that were thrown out of traditional drug treatment centers because of their “aggressive behavior.”

To help fill the education void, we have formed a non-profit foundation – The Taylor Hooton Foundation for Fighting Steroid

Abuse, the only private group that is organizing to help fight this battle. We would like to explore ways to work with you make our Foundation part of your efforts moving forward.

There are other things that you can do such as strengthening the penalties for distribution and possession and insuring that existing laws are enforced. And we need to find ways to stop the flow of steroids across our borders.

Creative legislation is needed NOW. Doing nothing will insure that steroid use will grow. Pros continue to use, coaches continue to look the other way for whatever reason, and parents continue to push their kids to get that scholarship. Knowingly or unknowingly, our kids continue to be pressured into using steroids.



Donald M. Hooton, Sr.

Just 20 months ago, Don Hootons' youngest son Taylor committed suicide. After conducting research and consulting with a number of the world's experts, Mr. Hooton developed the knowledge that it is highly likely that his son's secret use of anabolic steroids resulted in depression that was serious enough to cause Taylor to take his own life. Furthermore, he learned that the use of steroids amongst our youth is very high - much higher than most people realize!

Prior to losing Taylor, the Hootons were unaware of the dangers of anabolic steroids. They now realize that most parents that travel to football stadiums, baseball fields and other sports venues around this country every week to watch their kids play sports are just as ignorant as they were about steroids before their tragedy. Instinctively, they have reached out to parents and coaches to share their family's story with the hope that if others are armed with their knowledge, that they can avoid the tragedy that has devastated their family.

In order to help get their message out, the Hootons have formed the Taylor Hooton Foundation for Fighting Steroid Abuse. The organization is incorporated in Washington, DC and is the nation's first private organization dedicated to educating coaches, parents and students about the dangers of anabolic steroids. Mr. Hooton has spoken to high school audiences all over the country on this subject. He is serving in a volunteer capacity as the Foundation's Chairman and President and sits on the Board with two other distinguished volunteers.

Mr. Hooton's testimony will introduce you to Taylor, review the psychological effects that steroids can have on users, discuss how widespread the use of steroids are amongst our nation's youth, provide you with his perspective on what influence professional athletes are having on our youth, and provide you with his recommendations on what we should do to curb the growth in usage of this dangerous drug.

Don Hooton is a Marketing Executive with HP. He is responsible for developing business for highly specialized telecom software products that are sold into the world-wide telecom market. Don has performed various roles within several telecommunications companies during his 30+ year career - including several senior executive assignments.

The story of Taylor Hooton and the Foundation that has been formed in his name has captured the media's attention. Mr. Hooton's appearance before the US Congress is at the pinnacle of a series of appearances that he has made over the past year as part of ringing the warning bell about the dangers of steroid abuse amongst our nation's youth.

National Coverage

- New York Times, Sports Page Cover Story
- CBS 60 Minutes II – "The Kid Next Door"
- CBS 48 Hours
- Jane Pauley Show – one-hour program
- NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw
- Fox News Network: interview with John Gibson - "The Big Story" as well as a one-hour Special on Steroid Abuse – "Breaking Point"
- ESPN live interview on "Outside the Lines Nightly" with Bob Ley as well as on "Sports Center"
- CNN has run several stories
- People Magazine feature article – May 31, 2004 Issue
- Newsweek – two stories
- Readers' Digest feature article – July 2003 Issue
- Story in Weekly Reader Magazine
- Cover story in American School Board Journal – distributed to 35,000 school board members across the US
- One hour special on Connecting with Kids Network
- Live interview on Family Net's "At Home" Program
- KRON-TV (San Francisco)

- WB TV (Boston)

- Radio interviews on Dallas (multiple), Detroit, Odessa, Tampa, and San Francisco stations as well as the Canadian Broadcasting Network

Local Coverage

- Multiple articles in Dallas Morning News – plus supporting editorial
- Multiple articles in Plano Star Courier and Dallas Observer
- Coverage on all Dallas TV stations
- Story on Texas High School Sports TV Network – aired across Texas
- Story in Dallas Teen Magazine

International Coverage

- Japanese TV have covered this story
- Mainichi News (a major national daily Japanese newspaper)
- Swedish TV interview (Stockholm)
- Spot-On Magazine, a German teen magazine

Legislative

- Mr. Hooton testified before the US Senate Caucus on International Narcotics in July 2003
- Mr. Hooton was the lead witness at April 2004 California State Senate hearings

Contact information:

Donald M. Hooton
Chairman, President and Director
Taylor Hooton Foundation
6009 West Parker Road, Suite 149
P.M.B. Box 138
Plano, Texas 75093
214-725-9590 (cell)
972-309-6388 (office)